



The Amateur in You, Part 1

What have you been pondering?



Get a good antenna for your HT

Now that you've purchased an HT (handheld transceiver), equipment-wise you're almost ready to meet the ham radio world head-on. There are still several improvements you can get for your station, but perhaps the most important is a good antenna.

Your HT arrived with a short stock antenna we sometimes call a *rubber duck*. Its purpose is more for testing your radio, rather than for serious use. A good location can help a lot, but a good antenna can help improve your signal at a given location even more. Here are several antenna options that can help:

Traditional whip

A [whip antenna](#) is one that's attached to your HT, but is more adapted to serious radio operation rather than simply testing. The [Signal Stick antenna](#) is a superior variation of a traditional whip, that's lighter, more flexible, and performs better than other whips. Simply replace your rubber duck with one of these, and you'll notice the improvement right away.

Telescopic whip

Some HT whip antennas are [telescopic](#), in that they're made from several sections of metal sliding tubes. A telescopic whip antenna tends to be a little more rigid than a traditional whip, but can be stored compactly in its retracted position and can out-perform a traditional whip because it's typically longer.

J-pole

A J-pole antenna is one that contains both a radiator and a [counterpoise](#), typically oriented in parallel with each other. The three most popular J-pole types are the [copper cactus J-pole](#), the [open-stub "Pockrus" J-pole](#), and the [roll-up J-pole](#). An advantage of a J-pole over other antennas is that they're typically a half-wave long, making the most of your signal.

Connect your HT to one by means of a length of [coax](#) (coaxial cable) and maybe even a [pig-tail adapter](#). Then, stand the antenna up against a window or sliding glass door, or even mount it on your roof.

Mobile whip

You can purchase an [antenna made for a vehicle](#), and mount it on your vehicle or on an old cookie sheet in your home, and connect it to your HT by coax, to get your signal out far.

Ground plane

Often the first antennas that hams make on their own is a [ground plane](#), which consists of a vertical radiating element and one or more radials. It connects to your HT by coax, performs very well, and is inexpensive.

Collinear vertical

A very popular and high-performing omnidirectional antenna you can connect to your HT is a [collinear vertical](#), so-called because it's actually two or more vertical antennas stacked vertically on top of each other. Connect your HT by coax to one of these mounted on your roof to send your signal far away.

Yagi beam

A Yagi beam is a high-performing, directional antenna that's typically mounted on a tower or far above your rooftop. You can easily [purchase one](#) or [make one of your own](#), that you can hold in your hand for portable work, while it's connected by coax to your HT.

Tactical antenna

Arriving a little late on the scene, but gaining popularity, is the [tactical antenna](#), which is made from tape measure metal strips and which you can attach to your HT like you would a whip.